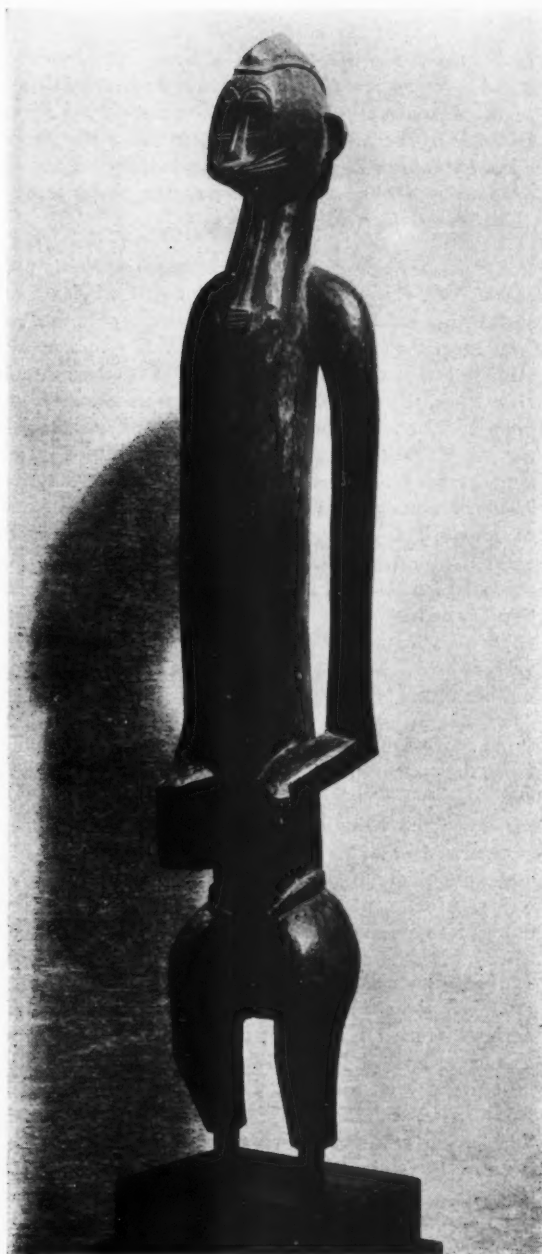


MAY 8 1935



**The Bulletin
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The Museum
of
Modern Art**

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Lent by the painter André Derain to the Museum's exhibition of African Negro Art, an imposing wooden figure from the French Sudan, thirty-five inches high. Derain was among the first to appreciate the artistic value of African sculpture.

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African Negro Art

by Charles Ratton

M. Ratton is one of the foremost European experts on African Negro art. He was appointed official delegate to the Museum's exhibition by Professor Paul Rivet, Director of the Ethnographical Museum of the Trocadéro. He is now at work upon a comprehensive study of African Art in which he expects to prove several unorthodox theories.

America does not seem to have shared at least up to recent years Europe's enthusiasm for African Negro art and the few exhibitions held in this country¹ have done little more than arouse curiosity in those who were not already initiated. Now the Museum of Modern Art in New York, thanks to Mr. James Johnson Sweeney, has succeeded in achieving what had not yet been done on the other side of the Atlantic: it has assembled into a single exhibition most of the finest African sculpture scattered among the museums and private collections of Europe. This event is important both because its very success indicates a shift in the esthetic attitude of the cultivated public and because, thanks to the juxtaposition of the best works from the various artistic centers of Africa, we are enabled to compare their relative values and in so doing make perhaps some new contributions to the infant science of African archaeology.

Our knowledge of African art is of very recent date. Since the sixteenth century travelers had brought back weapons, ivory objects, statuettes, which were sometimes preserved in a cabinet as curiosities. Later some of the best pieces of African sculpture were mixed in ethnographical museums along with thousands of other objects which could be of interest only to science. But no one had ever remarked that these pieces were beautiful.

It is less than thirty years since the "discovery" of African Negro art by the artists and writers of Paris. The exact date² and circumstances of this discovery are controversial but Vlaminck, Derain, Matisse, Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob and André Salmon were among the pioneer enthusiasts. Which of them was the first? Some of them have written memoirs or made statements. Almost all are still living. One may consult them on this historic point but the versions which they give do not agree. Considering these contradictory testimonies it is perhaps fairest to give credit for the discovery to the group as a whole. At the same time some of these same artists proclaimed a great unknown painter, the *douanier* Rousseau. As in the case of Negro art it is impossible to say precisely who first appreciated Rousseau from the bottom of his heart, who was the first not to laugh at him even a little.

The influence of Negro art was felt almost immediately by the painters Picasso and Braque just before the birth of cubism. They saw works of art in the Negro objects which preceding generations had considered mere chunks of wood or curiosities or at best ethnographical specimens. This does them great honor. The fact that they used Negro art does not diminish the honor of their discovery.

Negro art became a sanction for the cubists, the necessary justification for their sudden departure from beaten paths. Engaged as they were in revolutionary experiment they appreciated as really "Negro" (within the limited number of pieces then known) only those sculptures which displayed forms sufficiently stylized to confirm their theories. On the other hand all traces of realism, refinement or elegance of execution they disdainfully considered proofs of European or Arab influence. Thanks to this point of view they admired as synthesis what was really the more or less adroit simplification by an indolent sculptor working with primitive tools upon rebellious materials.

We have travelled a long way since then and we have come to judge Negro art by very different standards from those of its first critics whose writings still bear witness to their opinions. For us Negro art is no longer a primitive or savage art nor does our interest in it rest any longer upon passing esthetic fashions. Having learned to love it for its own sake we now wish to study it more seriously.

Our knowledge has made some progress because nearly all that was directly accessible has now come out of Africa and has gone into collections. We have been able to learn that purely African sculpture is not necessarily schematic; we have also ascertained both in the case of works from the Congo and in those from East Africa that very often the earlier sculptures are more carefully executed, more highly modelled and more naturalistic. After having established within Africa the regions in which sculpture flourished, it has been possible, thanks to morphological studies, to classify these regions into certain main groups and even at times to guess the relations and influences between the various groups. But now if we want to go further, we must turn to ethnography, to history; we must start excavations in this virgin soil; we must attempt to organize the archeology of Negro Africa in the same way as the archeology of pre-Columbian America and that of ancient China were organized some years ago. This is no easy task. We must write page by page into an empty book the history of a continent which did not know how to write. Starting with our present knowledge of African art we shall go back far enough to solve the enigma that Africa still is. It is doubtless in Africa that we will have the fortune to find traces, more recent than on

other continents, of a history different from ours, of history of a civilization based upon a natural order instead of upon an order established by man; a history which became detached from ours at the very moment in which Western Europe came to be constituted and at the moment in which we Europeans began to have eyes only for ourselves.

The reverse movement has begun nowadays with the decline of whatever individualism our culture still retains. It is perhaps instinctively that we tend to be interested in a different order of values now that we have come to apprehend the limitations of mechanical progress and to realize that it only satisfies a part of human life, perhaps the least necessary. Now we must fasten again the links we loosened when we started out on our adventure; we must dig as deeply as possible back into the centuries which have accumulated like leaves over the common soil which at one time nourished together the cultures of Europe, Africa and Asia. We shall discover continuous connections which will enable us to understand the relations between the rock paintings and engravings of Africa (so similar to those of France and of Spain), and the wood, bronze and ivory sculptures shown in such perfect examples at the Museum of Modern Art. We must discover the solutions to these problems. The African expeditions of the ethnographical Museum of the Trocadéro have made important beginnings. May this New York exhibition, thanks to the curiosity and excitement that it has already awakened, stimulate cooperation in this research which will write a gigantic chapter of humanity.

¹ The exhibition in New York at Gallery "291" (Stieglitz) in 1914 and the Modern Gallery (de Zayas) in 1916 were probably earlier than any public exhibitions held in Paris.—Ed.

² M. Ratton believes 1907 to be the exact date judging by the evidence of the influence of Negro sculpture upon the work of Picasso and Braque of that year. Vlaminck, according to some accounts, discovered Negro art in Paris as early as 1904 or 1905. In Germany about the same time Kirchner of the *Brücke* group is said to have taken his friends Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff to admire African and Polynesian art in the Dresden ethnographical museum.—Ed.

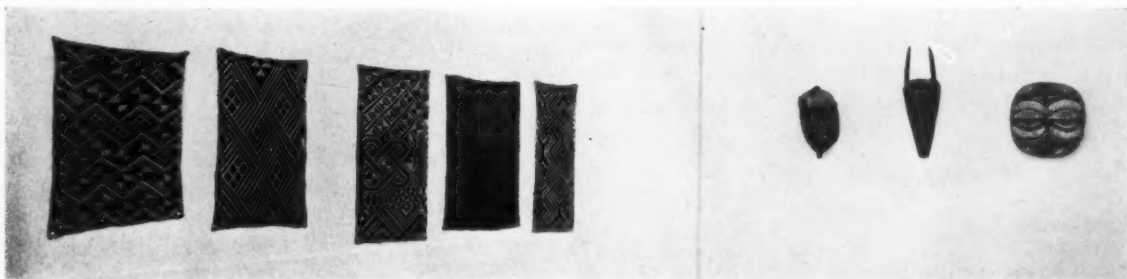
Antiquity of African Sculpture

"How old are these things" is the question most often asked by visitors to the exhibition. It is impossible to give a very definite answer.

It is less than ten years since the publication of a book in which African Negro masks and fetishes in wood were said to be a thousand or even 1500 years old. No such claims are convincingly made today. In his introduction to the catalog Mr. Sweeney suggests that very little sculpture in wood can be older than one hundred and fifty years because of the perishable nature of the material in a tropical climate. The wood sculpture of the comparatively dry region of the Sudan has had more chance of longer survival. In any case there is little evidence to prove an exact dating.

The bronze sculpture of Benin has been dated by some authorities as early as the 12th century but for the most part Benin bronzes of good quality were produced during the late 15th, 16th and 17th centuries.

The terra cotta heads from Ifa illustrated in the catalog, Nos. 292-295, are possibly the oldest African sculpture. Frobenius who dug them up in 1910 believed them to be two or three thousand years old and to have some connection with the Etruscans or even with Atlantis. The great Egyptologist, Flinders Petrie, thought them similar to Egyptian sculpture of the Persian period, 6th-5th centuries B.C. Talbot places them between 2000 and 1000 B.C. and von Sydow, going to the other and more plausible extreme, dates them near the end of the 15th century A.D. because of their similarity to a series of Benin heads of that time. A. H. B., Jr.



Artists were the first to appreciate Negro art. In no previous exhibition at the Museum have so many artist-collectors been among the lenders. Of the five Congo velvets shown in this photograph of a fourth floor gallery two were lent by Henri-Matisse and one by the cubist painter, Louis Marcoussis. The masks from left to right were lent by the poet Tristan Tzara, the cubist sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, and the painter André Derain. Other artists among the lenders are André Lhote and Patrick Henry Bruce of Paris, and Richard Bedford of London.



A gigantic mask of scented wood twenty-one inches high from the Lake Tanganyika district of British East Africa, lent to the exhibition by the Courtauld Institute of Fine Arts, London. The mask was bequeathed to the Institute by the late Roger Fry, critic, painter and former curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Roger Fry's essay on Negro sculpture published in his *Vision and Design*, 1920, is one of the earliest and best introductions in English to the esthetics of the subject.

Attendance

The total number of visitors to the African Negro Art Exhibition from March 19 to April 19 has been 30,330, or an average of 1000 visitors a day. The Museum felt that the exhibition would be of great interest to the Negroes of New York and has made efforts to bring it to their attention. The result has been an increase of almost 6% in the attendance at the Museum.

Lecture

Professor Franz Boas, Head of the Department of Anthropology of Columbia University, lectured on Primitive African Art to members of the Museum and of the Cosmopolitan Club on the evening of April 17th. The lecture was illustrated by slides.

Vote of Thanks

From the minutes of the April meeting of the Board of Trustees

It was moved, seconded, voted, and approved to extend thanks to Mr. James Johnson Sweeney for his generous services as Director of the African Negro Art Exhibition and for his contribution of a foreword to the catalog.

It was moved, seconded, voted, and approved to present Mr. Sweeney with a complete set of photographs of the exhibition now being prepared under a grant from the General Education Board.

Circulating Exhibitions 1935-36

1. Exhibition of African Negro Art. Itinerary complete.
2. A Brief Survey of Modern Painting. 60 of the finest color reproductions form an introduction to modern painting.
3. Reproductions of Mexican Frescoes by Diego Rivera. 19 color prints and 12 monotonies reproduce the famous frescoes at Chapingo, Cuernavaca and Mexico City.
4. Color Reproductions of Watercolors and Pastels. Important modern European and American artists are represented in this collection of 24 fine prints.
5. Color Reproductions of Paintings and Drawings by Vincent van Gogh, accompanied by biographical and critical notes and excerpts from the artist's letters to his brother concerning the works exhibited.
6. Photographs of Modern Architecture include the work of leading European and American architects and a section devoted to housing.
7. Photographs of Nineteenth Century American Houses by Walker Evans. 39 photographs of Victorian houses constitute an important document in the history of a seldom studied phase of American architecture.
8. Photographic Exhibition of Theatre Art. 148 mounted photographs reproduce the principal works shown in the International Exhibition of Theatre Art recently assembled for the Museum of Modern Art by Lee Simonson.
9. Exhibition of Machine Art. Machine parts, household appliances, scientific instruments and chemical glassware selected from the point of view of machine—as opposed to craft—design and manufacture.

Photographic Corpus

Under a grant from the General Education Board the Museum of Modern Art is preparing sets of photographs of the present exhibition to be known as the Photographic Corpus of African Negro Art. The Corpus will include 500 photographs of about 450 objects in the exhibition. Many of the objects will be photographed from two or three points of view. A catalog in the form of labels and indices will accompany the photographs. Thirteen sets will be assembled. The Museum proposes to distribute seven sets to Negro colleges and one set to the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library. Five sets will be available at a nominal fee to museums and universities (two of them have already been subscribed); and one set will be retained in the Library of the Museum of Modern Art. The Museum has been fortunate in securing the services of the distinguished photographer, Walker Evans, whose series of photographs of 19th century American houses is in the Museum's permanent collection.

This Corpus follows the precedent of the Theatre Art Corpus prepared by the Museum in 1934 under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.



Circulation

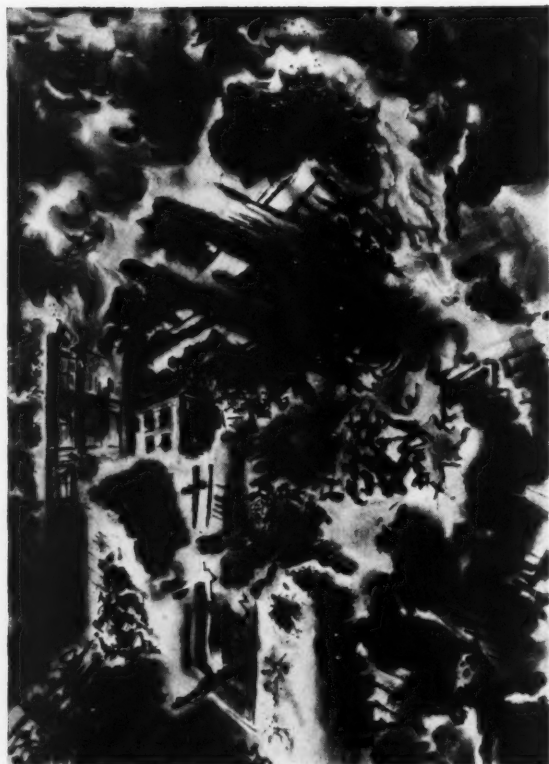
A selection of the finest objects from the Exhibition of African Negro Sculpture will be sent on tour to the following museums immediately after the close of the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art:

- June 10 to July 8, 1935—Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, N. H.
- July 29 to Sept. 2, 1935—San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, Calif.
- Sept. 28 to Oct. 27, 1935—Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio.
- Nov. 11 to Dec. 9, 1935—Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.
- Dec. 30 to Jan. 27, 1936—Milwaukee Art Institute, Milwaukee, Wis.
- Feb. 10 to Mar. 9, 1936—City Art Museum of St. Louis, St. Louis, Mo.
- Mar. 23 to Apr. 20, 1936—Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.

The schedule for the circulating exhibition was completed within three weeks following the announcement of the exhibition.



Extraordinary resemblance. *Left:* Head by a sculptor blind from birth. Reproduced in *Plastische Arbeiten Blinder* (Plastic Work of the Blind) by Ludwig Münz and Viktor Löwenfeld, Brünn, Czechoslovakia, Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1934. *Right:* Bronze pipe bowl from the Cameroon, lent by Mme. Helena Rubinstein to the African Negro Art Exhibition. The pear-shaped head, the bulging eyes and exaggerated eye sockets, the treatment of the nose and cheeks in the work of the blind sculptor are characteristically Cameroon. Possibly the African tribal sculptor has been guided in his modelling by his finger tips more than by his eyes. This might explain the similarity of his forms to those of the blind European.



George Grosz, *Punishment*. Watercolor, 1934. Given to the Museum by Mr. and Mrs. Erich Cohn during the Fifth Anniversary Exhibition in which it was included.

Bagdad-on-the-Subway, by George Grosz. Published by the Print Club, New York, in a limited edition of 150 copies. \$50.00.

This portfolio is the second in the program of the Print Club. It contains six reproductions of watercolors by George Grosz on a theme suggested by O. Henry. The titles, *Coney Island*, *The Bowery*, *Man-About-Town*, *Hall Bedroom* and *Brownstone Front*, recall the flavor of the O. Henry stories. Grosz has given the tawdry glamour and pathos of O. Henry's New York scene the brilliant iridescence of decay.

These facsimiles reproduce with amazing precision Grosz's peculiarly personal watercolor technique. The process is one of photo-lithography combined with hand-coloring by means of innumerable stencils. So exact is the result that the reproductions are indistinguishable from the originals. Each reproduction is signed by the artist.

The publishers have presented a copy of the folio to the Museum library.

E. M. F.

Book Notes

Books reviewed in these columns have been sent by the publishers as gifts to the Museum library.

Arts of West Africa. Edited by Michael E. Sadler, London, 1935. Oxford University Press for the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. 102 pages, 32 plates. \$2.00.

In the catalog of the Museum's exhibition James Johnson Sweeney wrote that "the art of Africa is already an art of the past." Mr. Sadler's volume is both a melancholy confirmation of this unhappy fact and an honorable but belated act of contrition on the part of European conquerors. In his introduction Sir William Rothenstein asks: "How can the little that still survives of the old vision and cunning of hand be preserved in Africa?" Discouraging answers to the question are given in two short chapters, "Educational Significance of Indigenous African Art" by G. A. Stevens, and "Teaching Woodcarving at Achimota" by Gabriel Pippet. Sir Michael Sadler's excellent essay on the "Significance and Vitality of African Art" points out that African sculpture is inseparable from the forms of religious ritual but that it would be "against the public interest to reinforce their obsolescent authority." Art dies with "superstition."

The plates illustrate over a hundred objects from museums within the British Empire. Some of the sculpture is mediocre but the descriptive notes by Richard Carline are conscientious and interesting. The annotated bibliography is useful.

A. H. B., JR.

Handbuch der Afrikanischen Plastik, Vol. I, by Eckart von Sydow. Berlin, 1930, Dietrich Reimer-Ernst Vohsen. 494 pages, 10 plates. 40 marks.

This is the first comprehensive, systematic study of African Negro sculpture. The first volume is confined to West Africa from Senegambia to Angola and to a critical and descriptive classification of material in other publications and museums. The second volume, not yet published, will cover the rest of Africa and will also consider problems of style and environment. Dr. von Sydow's approach is primarily that of the skeptical, scientific ethnographer. His book is indispensable to the serious student of African Art.

A. H. B., JR.

Kunst der Naturvölker; Sammlung Baron Eduard von der Heydt, by Eckart von Sydow, Berlin, 1932. Bruno Cassirer, quarto, paper bound. 216 pages, c. 100 plates.

Baron von der Heydt of Zandvoort, Berlin and Ascona, is one of the foremost collectors of Primitive Art—and one of the most generous. Many of his finest objects are on extended loan in the museums of Paris, Cologne, Zurich, and Hamburg. He has lent a dozen important works to the Museum's present exhibition. Dr. von Sydow's catalog is an elaborate and scholarly work with excellent half-tone plates. Oceanic and Indonesian, as well as African, works are included.

A. H. B., JR.

Art and Industry, by Herbert Read.¹ New York, Harcourt, Brace. 143 pages, 132 illustrations. \$3.75.

The title of this book is misleading as Mr. Read's entire thesis demonstrates the falseness of such a dichotomy. Over a hundred years ago England first attempted to solve the problem of the machine. Mr. Read finds the answer in the theories of the German, Walter Gropius and his accomplishments at the Bauhaus School. Gropius' understanding and reconciliation of the divergences of the handicraft tradition and machine production; his sensible grasp of the essential problem of industrial art—the artist versus the business man; and his acceptance of the necessity for a discrete esthetic for the machine inform Mr. Read's point of view. He approaches the manifold problems of contemporary industrial art historically, mechanically and esthetically. Each machine product is analyzed according to its method of production, the qualities inherent in its material and its function.

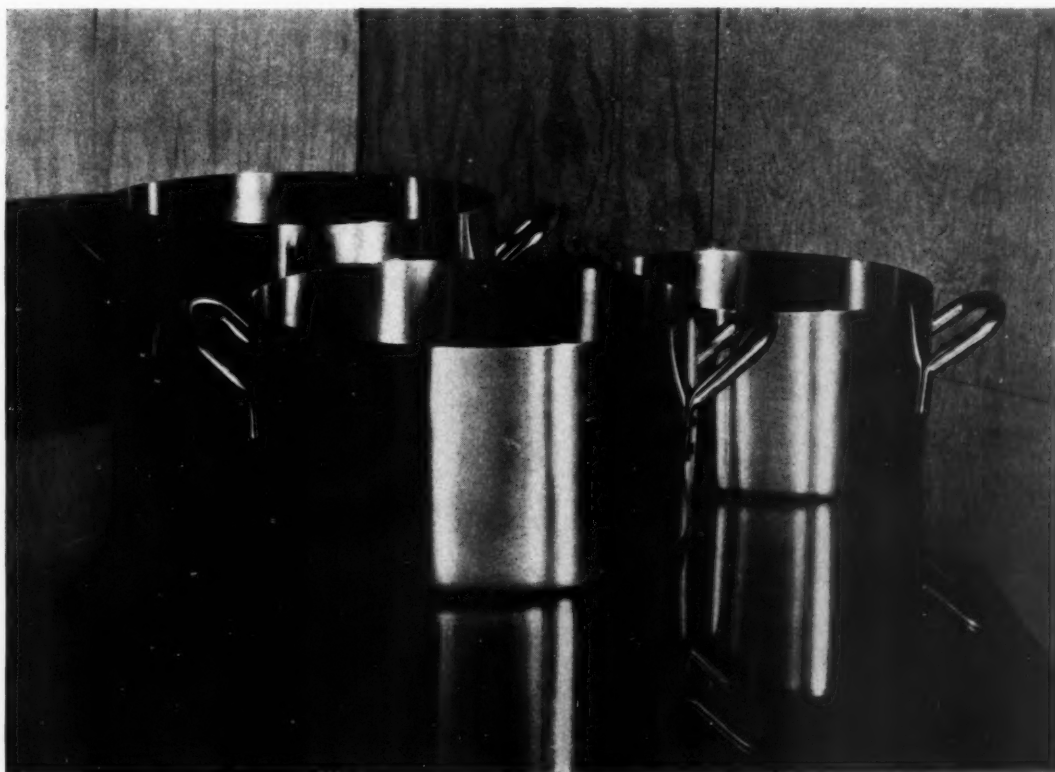
The chief value of the book lies in its historical background and in its general propaganda for a contemporary attitude toward contemporary problems. Mr. Read's exposure of such time honored bogies as "good taste," "applied art," "standardization" is welcome, but America has contributed newer bogies—"streamlining," "eye appeal," and "styling." Mr. Read

has learned well Gropius' functionalist point of view, but Gropius was succeeded at the Bauhaus by Miës van der Rohe and the bathroom ceased to dominate the home. Functionalism as an end has degenerated into the pseudo-scientific justification of the mediocre architect and industrial designer. Although Mr. Read's crusade against the tyranny of the craft tradition over the machine product is well fought, the machine esthetic has progressed beyond the need of such defense. As the craft tradition loses its hold on the machine product, the hand-made object begins to reflect the new esthetic of the machine.

The format of the book deserves consideration. The announced intention of the publishers was to make it a model of modern machine production and to that end entrusted the design to Herbert Bayer, formerly Professor of Typography at the Bauhaus and now one of the most original and adventurous of the younger German typographers. The limitations and illogicalities of a strictly functional esthetic are well illustrated by the typographical impasses from which the designer was unable to extricate himself. Among the large number of illustrations are many reproduced from *Machine Art*, published by the Museum of Modern Art.

Ernestine M. Fantl

¹ Author of *Art Now*, reviewed in Bulletin No. 7, Vol. I, March, 1934.



Hotel sauce pots, manufactured by the Lalancé & Grosjean Manufacturing Company. From the Exhibition of Machine Art. Given by the manufacturer to the Permanent Collection of the Museum.

Department of Architecture

Mr. Philip Goodwin, New York architect and a member of the Board of Trustees, has been appointed Chairman of the Architecture Committee. Mr. Goodwin has formed a Committee composed of Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., Professor of Architecture at Wesleyan University; George Howe, Philadelphia architect; and Joseph Hudnut, Dean of Architecture, Columbia University. Miss Ernestine M. Fantl, formerly assistant in the Department of Architecture, is the staff member in charge of the Department.

Projects of the Department include an exhibition of European typography, to be held in conjunction with the summer exhibition; an exhibition of the work of Henry Hobson Richardson; an exhibition of the work of California architects; and various smaller exhibitions to be held continuously in the Permanent Exhibition Room of the Department. The collection of photographs of modern architecture throughout the world is being amplified. Mr. Goodwin has given to the Department through the library subscriptions to important architectural periodicals.

Election of Trustees

The President and Trustees announce the election to the Board of Trustees of Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss of Washington, D. C., and Mr. Raymond B. Fosdick of New York. The elections took place respectively at the 47th meeting held on January 24th, 1935, and the 48th meeting held on March 14th, 1935.

The Staff

Thomas Dabney Mabry, Jr., has been appointed Executive Director to succeed Alan R. Blackburn, Jr., who resigned in September. Mr. Mabry whose home is in Clarksville, Tennessee, was graduated from Harvard in 1925, and later received his master's degree from Vanderbilt University. After several years' study abroad he came to New York where he was associated for two years with John Becker in his gallery. From 1932 to 1934 he was Assistant to the President of Fisk University. Before joining the Museum staff he had been Executive Secretary of the New School for Social Research in New York.



"Mob Scene." Part of the Exhibition of African Negro Art laid out for customs inspection before installation.

